Crofting a Way Forward?: Lara, Artifact Theft, and the Red Woman [Updated Version]

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by lefemmerouge

Summary

Lara almost gets an artifact from a cave but is thwarted by a woman wearing a red trenchcoat. After coming to her senses, she desperately tries to track down the woman so she can find the one clue that will lead her to Sam, someone she doesn't want to lose again, someone she wants to apologize to before it is too late.

Notes

Hey everyone! Happy Sunday! I originally posted this fic on AO3 in mid-October 2024, where it garnered over 740 hits, 4 bookmarks, 17 kudos, and 19 comments (including some of my replies). It also garnered 43 readers on Quotev, 22 readers on Wattpad, and 18 readers on here (listed as an inspiration). It was also the first-ever Tomb Raider: The Legend of Lara Croft fic on AO3.

The follow-up to this fic, which concerns one scene in particular, entitled "That Motorbike Ride" was posted on a certain site, and on here (listed as an inspiration) first, then on other sites. As such, the following A/N is slightly different. In my original A/N, I noted that I recently finished "Tomb Raider: The Legend of Lara Croft" (TLOLC) and wanted a crossover as TLOLC reminded me of Carmen Sandiego. I also talked about possible future crossovers, including with my Doctor Aphra series ("Aphra's Sapphic Escapade Through the Stars"), which can be read on here or on AO3. In that same A/N I said that "voting in this current election (at least in the U.S.) is important, to not vote for the orange man at the very least, and in local issues, as there's a lot on the ballot this time around" since that was a "key part of the story" and I linked to other fics for this fandom (none of which I've written). Presently, there are almost 40 TLOLC fics on AO3 and three on Squidge World, all of which I've written.

I tried to make this fic even more gay than the original, with the addition of over 570 words [original was 5288 words], plus revising the fic overall.

Comments are welcome and appreciated.

See the end of the work for more notes

- Inspired by Crofting a Way Forward?: Lara, Artifact Theft, and the Red Woman by lefemmerouge
- Inspired by That Motorbike Ride by lefemmerouge

Everything had been going well that is until she faced a woman with long, flowing brown hair. The woman's eyes pierced right into her. It was almost like they were looking into her soul. "I need to make sure this artifact doesn't fall into the hands of VILE…or those who used to be part of it…I can't let them hurt anyone else!" the woman loudly declared, her voice echoing through the caverns.

After she had, *somehow*, been thoroughly beaten in hand-to-hand combat, Lara pleaded with this woman to change her mind. She was rarely bested in a fight. This was incredibly rare. Her skills allowed her to beat almost any other foe, in nearly every confrontation. As she lay on the ground, trounced, the woman came close to her. She put her finger on her nose, then quickly removed it, almost like she had never touched it. She proceeded to tease the muscled Brit.

"You may be cute, but that isn't going to be enough to win over *me*. I already have a woman I love, *you know*."

As she walked away, with the artifact firmly in her hand, Lara attempted to reach out. She did this to no avail. How could this woman be so cruel? *Why* would she do this do her? Hadn't she been through enough?

The woman quickly flew away on her glider, which extruded from her backpack. She shouted "Arrivederci, bella donna!", with her voice echoing throughout the cave. Lara looked at the device with awe. *How* could she be bested by someone like this? What was wrong with her? Was she not good enough? She couldn't believe what had happened. It was still sinking in.

She slammed her fist into the ground. She was furious with herself. "Zip, I'm gonna *need* one of those," pointing to Carmen's glider. He sighed. While he was willing to support her, he also wanted her to settle down. That didn't mean getting married or any of that unnecessary stuff. Instead it meant, in her case, to get *away* from treasure-hunting, and settle down in some day.

"Sure, Lara." He typed away on his keyboard. He was working out of the former study used by Lara's father, within the Croft family mansion, which he had turned into a sort-of office. He added, "I just looked up that woman who…uh…fought you…she's an international thief named Carmen Sandiego." That name *sounded familiar* to her. She couldn't quite place it. Zip gave her a word of caution. "She's a pretty big deal, you know. She works with the police and took down this gang of villains…maybe you two would hit it off…in a different situation?"

Lara couldn't believe he was saying this. She wanted to get back at Carmen…*no matter* the cost. She wasn't going to live this down. "Maybe,

but she has *gotta* pay for what she did today...to *me*...I won't let her get away"

Zip didn't know what to tell her. He did know that Carmen could pose a problem if Lara wanted to continue treasure hunting, or whatever she called it now. He nervously replied, "yeah, yeah, okay. If you just talked to her or something...you could work it out...I mean she is pretty stylish and cute, right?" He always liked women's styles. Perhaps that was influenced by his *very good* friend, who loved fashion, and chattered to him about it.

Lara rolled her eyes. They should *not* be having this conversation now. Seriously? She *already* had women she liked, either her childhood friend, and present INTERPOL agent, Camilla Roth, or her very good friend, Sam, who was still missing, despite her best efforts. Finding this artifact was one of the key clues she needed to find her. She didn't want to lose her again after everything...

Putting that out of her mind for a second, she crawled out of the cave and started to make her way down the cliff side. She struggled along the way, as she was clearly injured from the battle with that notorious thief. She couldn't go after Carmen, right now, even if she wanted to. It wouldn't be safe. However, injuries hadn't stopped her behind this. It wouldn't stop her this time either. She would win.

Just then, Zip piped up. "Lara, you aren't gonna believe this. I've got visual confirmation that the woman you just fought is on her way to Paris..." Lara knew where she was going next, even if it was that blasted city she *always* hated. The only thing she liked about the city was...Camilla...a woman she continued to have...complicated feelings for. She was unsure if it was friendship or love. She vaguely remembered Camilla had said she loved her when she'd been controlled by one of the ancient purity stones. It was all still a bit fuzzy. She wasn't sure if she had imagined Camilla's words or they had actually happened.

Staggering across the ground, she found her motorcycle, which she'd stashed behind some brambles. She drove it to where a plane was waiting. Leo was aboard. He'd been just as helpful to her as Zip and Jonah was, as all of them were part of her team. She relied on him for transportation, especially in cases like this. He'd been on standby just in case things went wrong. And this was one of those cases.

"Lara, you look terrible...what in the world happened to you?" Leo asked, clearly concerned. The last thing he wanted was to see Lara hurt. He wanted her to be safe. He didn't care about her romantically, but only as a friend and nothing more. Lara was about to answer. She could barely hold herself up. She had gone through *so much* to get there. *Why* did this woman do this to her? Lara finally had the strength to tell him.

"Some woman…she came in and got the artifact before me…I *need* to find her." Leo understood. He owed it to Jonah to not let any harm come to her. It was the least he could do.

"Okay. I'll start up the plane. Get ready to come aboard!" Lara jumped on the motor bike again and revved up the engine. She was ready. As the engines roared to life, he opened the cargo door, and she drove inside.

The plane was a modified C1-40 which the U.S. military usually used. It was a bit impractical. Even so, the plane served her purposes well, at least now. Stepping off her bike, she collapsed on the plane's floor. She was so tired after everything. More than that, she was furious with herself. As she began to cry, she quickly wiped away her tears. Now wasn't the time for this. She could deal with those feelings later.

She staggered and made her way to the cockpit. She sat in the seat next to Leo. "That woman…she's in Paris," he told her. He nodded. The plane took off in no time at all. Zip began feeding her more information along the way. She hadn't totally recovered yet. She didn't care. She had to find this damn woman. There was no time to waste.

"Lara, I just tracked that woman to a corner cafe in downtown Paris…she just handed off the artifact to someone else…but that woman is still sitting there, like she's waiting for someone else."

She believed that now was her chance. She had to get the artifact back, now matter what. The fact she hadn't fully recovered didn't matter. Having Sam back was all that she cared about… everything else was secondary, even her own health and well-being. This worried Zip. From time to time, he tried to gently remind her to take better care of herself. As he was about to speak, Leo spoke.

"Lara, we are reaching the drop zone. Are you sure you want to do this? I think you need some serious medical attention…rather than parachuting out of a plane…"

She laughed. This was *nothing*. She had been through worse in the past. I mean, she lived through a near-apocalypse of the entire world. "*I'm fine*, Leo. I can take care of myself." She nearly shouted this after he opened the cargo bay doors. Without saying anything more, she jumped out, descending onto the city below. She wasn't entirely sure what awaited her, but she would get that thief if it was the last thing she'd do.

As she plummeted toward the cobbled street, her parachute expanded, allowing her to float down gracefully to the ground. Carmen happened to look up at that very moment, noticing a woman coming her direction. She couldn't see Lara completely yet, but hoped this wouldn't be someone trying to capture her, hauling her away to jail. Preparing herself, she suddenly saw who it was: Lara. Chuckling, she turned up her phone's

volume to the highest possible setting. She began playing a remix of the Weather Girls hit song, "It's Raining Men," with the word "men" replaced by "women." She had saved it to her phone years ago, as a joke, but had never had a reason to use it until now.

Lara couldn't believe it. Was this woman seriously for real? Why was she messing with her like this? Is *this* what flirting was like? She didn't know the answers to any of those questions, and she didn't care much about that. Finding Sam and rescuing her from the evil people who took her was paramount. Carmen would give her what she needed, no matter what happened to her.

She touched down in the middle of the street, with her parachute falling behind her. Luckily, this was a quiet street and there weren't any cars. She still could have landed but… it would have been harder.

After slashing off the ropes for the parachute with a handy knife, she stepped forward to the chic cafe where Carmen was sitting. She had since paused the song and was quietly drinking her tea. Like she was a proper English woman, she placed it down on a saucer. That was the way things were done there. She wasn't afraid of Lara. She was confident she could defeat her yet again.

"Hello Miss...nice to see you again. Are you here to try to fight with me again? Or do you *really* want to get trounced? Because I'll give you *a whopping.*"

Lara grumbled. She pulled up a chair as Carmen continued to sip her tea. Could this woman be any more annoying? She slammed her fist down on the table, causing everything to shake. Carmen stopped anything from breaking, catching it so nothing fell onto the ground. She could tell that Lara was angry. She wanted to calm her down and prevent her from harming her in any way, shape, or form.

"I don't want to fight you…I just want that artifact back that *you* stole from me. I need it to find my friend…it's the only clue I have left…please give it to me."

Carmen shook her head. That was one thing she couldn't do. She didn't entirely trust this woman *and* on top of that, she didn't know what she would do with the artifact. *How* could she be sure that this woman was telling the truth?

"This artifact should be in a museum and be studied by experts. It will be safer there than in a damp, dark cave."

Lara couldn't believe this. Why would she want it in some stuffy museum? She hated places like that. What this woman was saying echoed what Eva Tong would say, her sort-of-friend (or perhaps

something more) who was a curator in China. Eva was part of a group that fixed and repaired artifacts, then repatriated them to their home countries. She didn't want to be part of that. It wasn't her style. Not at all.

"I want...no...I *need* that artifact back...I can't lose Sam again...after everything I've been through...please...I just want to make sure she is safe...if you can…"

She stopped mid-sentence. Her exhaustion washed over her. She had started to become dizzy. She couldn't hold it together anymore. She fell upon the table, causing the hot tea to spill. The tea cup and saucer fell off the table and smashing on the ground. Carmen attempted to wake her up, time and again, but could not. She could hear someone in the earpiece, within Lara's right ear, speaking, with a tone of concern.

"Lara, are you okay? I can come there right away...just give me some time…"

Carmen took the earpiece out of Lara's ear and began talking into it. For her, the person speaking out of the device was a mystery, as was Lara. Despite that, she felt obligated to help her. Maybe it was just in hr nature.

"I don't know who you are, mister, but...I want to make sure *your friend* is alright. I have a secret place I could bring her to...if that's okay with you."

Zip mulled this over. Could he even trust her? Was he making a mistake? He wracked his mind with these questions. He didn't have many conditions.

"Fine. I have one condition: I have to track her the entire time...I want to make sure she is safe."

Carmen wasn't sure. This could be a breach of their security. What if this person was working with the police? What if he turned in Carmen to the authorities? She already had a so-so relationship with cops, which was *usually* smoothed over thanks to her connections with ACME. However, not all of them respected that organization. Some saw it, not wrongly, as an unchecked, unaccountable private security firm.

After telling Zip to wait a second, she put down Lara's earpiece. She then spoke into *her* earpiece. "Player, what do you think? Can we trust this guy? Or...is it too much of a risk?"

Player laughed. He knew she was careful, but this would be a piece of cake. She didn't need to worry. "Red, it's okay. I'll be watching him...I'm an expert hacker...don't you forget."

That reassured her. She knew he was right. She picked up Lara's earpiece and began speaking into it once again.

"Mister, we accept your conditions…but be warned, my friend is a skilled hacker...so if you do anything out of line, we will be *watching* you...so don't try to double cross us."

Zip understood. He was skilled with technology, especially surveillance, even though he didn't have any advanced hacking skills or anything along those lines. He was still learning. "Okay. I implore you to take her somewhere safe...she has people who might be after her...some vicious types...so please be careful..."

Carmen threw some money on the table and apologized to the servers for the trouble. Seconds later, she hopped on her bright red bike, which was the same color as her usual iconic outfits. She wrapped Lara's arms around her, and strapped her in with a belt, so she wouldn't go flying off. She had installed the sat belt in case of emergencies.

She placed Lara's earpiece in her right ear, while keeping her usual earpiece in her left ear. She drove off while indicating to Player to get her private jet ready. She started to speak to Zip.

"So...uh...mister, who are you...and who is this woman? I don't know anything about her apart from the fact she fought me in that cave and descended from the sky, wanting that artifact back to save someone named 'Sam'"...can you please help me out here?...any little detail would be great...you don't have to tell me much if you don't want."

Zip didn't know whether he should be revealing much of anything. Even so, he was willing to provide *some* information. Lara could tell her the rest once she woke up, whenever that would be.

"I'm Zip. And that woman is the great, and *legendary*, Lara Croft. She raids tombs and takes artifacts...for...uh...certain reasons. She is trying to rescue her uh...*close* friend...Samantha Nishimura...after she was kidnapped."

It all made sense to Carmen, at least a little bit. Part of her sensed that Lara and this 'Sam' person had...a connection that went beyond a simple friendship, even a romantic friendship. But she didn't say anything. Not at all. She kept her mouth shut, keeping any such thoughts to herself, at least for now. She continued to chat with Zip on their way to the plane.

She soon came upon a nondescript airfield, which ACME let her use, thanks to an agreement she had made when going after VILE. She made her way through the fence and onto the plane. Some people that Carmen trusted were on board as pilots. She didn't call Julia, Ivy, Zack,

Shadowsan, or anyone like that, to be there. She could do this on her own. She didn't need their health

As the plane took off, Zip guessed its trajectory based on the predicted fight path. The destination would be San Francisco. She was going to the U.S.? Lara wasn't gonna like that. She had refused to go there as a protest for years upon years… She was always glad she was British. She didn't have a choice this time. In fact, the choice was, in a sense, made for her.

In no time at all, a few hours had passed. The plane had landed. Carmen parked her motorbike in a secure location. Zack and Ivy helped to place Lara into a nondescript van. At the time, Lara was still out of it and had no idea what was happening to her. At least she wasn't having any nightmares or traumatic flashbacks.

With some effort, Zack, Ivy, and Carmen carried her up the stairs, into the elevator, and onto the second floor. They struggled because her muscle meant that she was more heavy than someone like Carmen. Despite that they were able to lower Lara onto the couch. As Zack and Ivy left, Carmen surreptitiously placed a blanket on top of her. Lara continued to sleep through the night, clearly tired in more ways than one. That wasn't much of a surprise.

Lara began swaying side to side. She imagined everyone shouting at her, beginning with Joslin Reyes, whose loud voice boomed. "Roth died because of you. It's *your* fault, Lara. You are the one to blame!" This was followed by Jonah and then Sam. They all pointed at her, declaring that *she* was the reason that Conrad Roth had died in Yamatai. She weakly replied, attempting, and failing, to defend herself, as the world seemed to collapse around her. "No, it wasn't me...you are all wrong...if you would please let me explain..." Tears began running down her cheeks. She felt completely alone. She almost felt like everyone had abandoned her right then and here.

Just then, she awoke with a start. At that moment, she thrust her knife into the air. This place was unfamiliar. Where was she? She looked around. What she saw appeared to be a cross-between a bachelor pad, an office, and a girl's hang out, from what she could gather. She suddenly saw a woman, nearby, dressed casually and with brown hair. The woman her seemed familiar...but she couldn't tell what it was, at first.

As the woman came closer, she extended her hand toward her. This surprised Lara a bit.

"Hi, I'm Carmen. Nice to meet you…after you've been resting for three days in my...uh…pad."

Lara tried to be nice. She still had aches and pains all over her body, although she didn't feel tired anymore. She almost felt energized. So, that was a positive. "Oh…I didn't mean to impose," she said in her British accent, which some mistakenly described as Australian. "I'm Lara…Croft…by the way," she stated sheepishly.

Carmen smiled back at her in response. "I'm happy to make your acquaintance." Lara hated all these silly formalities. At the same time, she didn't think she had recovered enough, yet, to fight back. Very quickly, she connected all the dots together. She realized that this woman, who was younger than her, had bested her in a fight only a few days ago. She couldn't live that down. Her fury returned.

"So, where the hell am I? I know I am in your pad…but…"

As she trailed off, Carmen revealed her base's location. This would be secret, under most usual circumstances. However, after talking with Zip, during which he revealed more about her, she was willing to share where they were, almost as a form of exchange. This was despite the fact that he told her that she would *not* be happy she was in the U.S., not at all.

"You're in San Francisco…I heard you don't like the U.S. from your friend but…" she started to say.

Lara sighed. In her current condition, she couldn't go anywhere. She would rather *not* be in the U.S. Even though she was British, she had read *all* the terrible things the U.S. had done. She had all the books by Howard Zinn, Chalmers Johnson, and a litany of others like William Blum, Kwame Nkrumah, Walter Rodney, and Frantz Fanon. Originally, when she didn't know much about the world, she had defended British and U.S. actions. Those she meet in poorer countries told her different, giving her recommendations. That began her self-education on the horrors of imperialism, and capitalism by extension.

"It is what it is…I *detest* what the U.S. has done across the world…the imperialist blood-letting through bombs, genocide, and the like…no one escapes the wrath of this empire…whether the people here, or the Iranians, the Lebanese, the Yemeni, the Libyans, the Zimbabweans, the Pakistanis, the Iraqis, the Palestinians, and so many more…"

Carmen nodded along. She had heard it all from others. What she said next surprised Lara.

"I completely agree with you, Lara. But, I live here…and I don't feel at home anywhere else…my friends are *here*, and it's what I know. If I moved to Canada, *Paris*…or any of those European cities, I'd feel lost."

Lara added a snide comment. "Yeah, Paris *sucks*…the only thing I like that's there is Camilla…and she and I…well we…you

know...are...uh...good *friends*...that's all we are, you know."

Carmen had heard this kind of thing from some friends in the past. Sometimes people said this to hide their romantic feelings for one another, queer people would call each other "friends." Surely, there were asexual people who didn't have romantic love for others, but only platonic love, which ranged across a spectrum. If Carmen could venture a guess, she'd probably say that Lara was *gay*. She got a *lot* of gay vibes off her.

"Right...," Carmen began, while continuing to drink her cup of tea. She had got in the habit of drinking tea as a way of calming down. And it worked, at least on some level.

"I'm sorry I took that artifact you *needed* to find your friend Sam...Zip told me about how Sam and you were close...I didn't mean to pry or anything like that...I just can understand where you are coming from."

Lara was taken aback. She was a little annoyed with Zip for sharing that personal information. Even so, she knew he meant well. She couldn't push everyone away. Having people like Zip as a form of support was always good.

"Really?...I thought you were an international thief who was on good terms with the police...that was my impression at least"

Carmen shook her head. She wondered why people still thought of her that way. She and the cops didn't get along. She was glad every day that ACME had her back.

"I *was* an international thief. These days, I do work-for-hire for museums...like where my girlfriend works...for a renowned museum...you might of heard of her...her name is Julia Argent."

Lara shrugged. That name didn't ring a bell. Carmen threw out another name: Eva Tong. Lara rolled her eyes. "You know her? She and I...uh...don't get along."

Carmen wasn't sure why, but she thought she'd venture a guess. "Is it because you...steal artifacts...I mean raid tombs...?" Lara nodded. That was exactly why, but it was partially the reason.

"I sort of do...but I also stole from her collection at the urging of my mentor, and sort of adopted father, and me and Eva...had...an *interesting* relationship at one point."

Her meaning was clear to Carmen. She knew now that she had pegged Lara correctly. She clearly *was gay*. There was no denying it. Some might

have said Lara was bi, but such an assessment was faulty in more ways than one.

"Sure...why don't we meet Julia...if I'm with you, we can look at the artifact and you won't...need to steal it...does that sound good to you?"

Lara nodded. She was still recovering from her injury. If she could do that for a little longer, it would be good, so she would be at her top shape to save Sam. She had to do it.

"Okay. Saving Sam is still my top priority...I don't want anyone to harm her...I also want to apologize to her for not keeping in contact over the years...and for everything."

As she struggled to stand up, Carmen helped her. They somehow made their way down the elevator, and to the nearby motorbike. Something about it brought back memories.

"You are gonna have to put your arms around me...unless you want me to buckle you in."

Lara didn't know exactly what she meant, but she *hated* seatbelts, especially when she was going on a chase. She knew they saved lives and all that jazz. Still, something about them constrained her.

"I'll...uh...put my arms around you...I always like to hug cute and stylish women."

Carmen blushed. Why was she feeling this way? She had *her own* girlfriend and she would be visiting her soon! She wasn't sure. In any case, she brushed any possible feelings she had aside. She was doing this as a friendly gesture, not anything more. Lara, on the other hand, could see what Zip had meant when she talked about Carmen. Maybe this former thief was the right person for her...and if everything with Sam didn't work out... She thrust it out of her mind. She didn't want to make it any more complicated. Once she got what she needed, they would part ways. That would be it.

She didn't say anything more as they hopped on the red-eye plane together, flying up to Toronto, where they would meet Julia. She was a curator of a huge museum there and part of the same consortium with Eva Tong. Unlike in the past, when she had slept on the ride to San Francisco, she was wide awake the entire time. Carmen slept by herself in the back of the plane, while Lara sat in the cockpit with someone Carmen had hired, someone that she trusted.

By the time they arrived in Toronto, it was nearly sunset. Their flight had been nearly five hours long. Carmen was yawning a bit, but could still pull herself together. Lara was alert and not tired at all.

They took a cab that Player had arranged for them. He was on vacation right now, taking a break from being her hacker. He had actually arranged a meet-up with Zip, of all people.

"You have arrived at your destination, Ms. Sandiego and Ms. Croft," the driver remarked. As they stepped out of the car, they both saw the towering building in front of them. It almost made them stand in awe. The etching above the huge columns were give words: "Toronto Museum of Natural History."

A bespectacled woman, with short brown hair, approached them. Carmen knew exactly who it was. "Ms. Argent, if you would please." She responded in kind, "it would my honor." They kept up appearances like this in case someone was watching. It was an effort to make sure none of them were in danger. They showed off behind closed doors more than did publicly, at least most of the time.

Once they went inside, Julia's expression completely changed. She flung herself onto Carmen. "I've missed you so much, Carm! Thank you for visiting...even if this is...about business." Carmen happily hugged her back, while Lara looked on. Was she really supposed to be here? She didn't want to intrude on their relationship...with one another. Quickly composing herself, she extended her hand to Lara.

"Nice to meet you, Ms. Croft. My uh...girlfriend has told me so much about you."

Lara didn't know how to take that. Was that a compliment? *What* had she said about her? She had so many questions. But, she didn't have time to ask those. Not now.

"Uh, okay, that's great...I'd like to see the artifact...please."

Julia could see that Lara meant business. Even with her bandages, Lara looked like someone who could knock her down and easily overpower her. Maybe she didn't have the appearance as to how Carmen described her. She led both of them down a hallway into a laboratory-like room. The artifact was sitting on a table in the middle of the room. Since it had just been brought in, very few people had handled it.

"So, here's the artifact. Please look at it… but don't pick it up as it will trigger an alarm."

Lara listened to this, for now, but she was ready to lift it off its stand if needed. She would *do anything* for Sam. Even if that involved her being hauled off by the cops.

In less than a minute she knew what it said. It was so obvious. How hadn't she guessed it prior to this? Maybe she was too dazed from

fighting Carmen at the time.

"The legend of the eight immortals crossing the Eastern sea! They soundly defeated the Dragon King, while crossing the ocean, thanks to each of their abilities. They are said to be in Penglai, a mythical land in east China! This was so hopeful...thanks for showing me, Ms. Argent. I can save Sam now!"

Julia was impressed. She didn't know that someone could recount a Chinese myth so easily and without even consulting a book! Perhaps she was as impressive as Carmen said after all.

"Miss...Croft...you are a very amazing woman. I understand why Carmen was so glowing with praise about you...if you need anything else, any historical expertise, please don't hesitate to give me a call...and call me Julia. We don't need to be so formal...you know."

Lara smiled. This had been a worthwhile trip after all. "Thanks, Julia. You can call me Lara." She handed Julia a slip of paper with her number on it. As she began to walk away, Carmen grabbed her arm.

"Don't leave so soon. Let me walk you out. I'll be back, Jules," she said, then trailed off. She expected that after this, Julia would likely give her a talking to after all that. She expected that.

As they walked outside, Lara appeared to be antsy. She wanted to save Sam as soon as possible. "I still don't know everything about you, Miss, but I'm still glad I met you." Carmen meant that earnestly.

Lara wanted this whole thing to end. She needed to get out of there. And quickly. She couldn't waste any time talking to her. She had to wrap this up quickly. "Yes, thank you, Carmen...I wouldn't have survived without what you did for me in San Francisco...I'll be grateful for that...if I can go...we can part ways amicably...that will be all."

Carmen came close and pulled out her phone. She hoped Lara did *one* last thing before she left. She blurted out a question.

"Can you *please* input your number here?" Lara agreed, even though she still wanted to leave. She typed in her number. As she began to pull away, Carmen came close again. She thought of smooching her on the cheek. If she had, she would have claimed it was a cultural custom. Even so, she knew that Lara was going through a lot. Instead, she decided to step back. She respected Lara as a person and her personal space.

Lara smiled. She was glad that Carmen hadn't done anything too rash, as she expected would happen. "Thanks...uh...Carmen...I'll see you around." She ran as fast as she could, ready to save Sam. Any emotions she had

from her interactions with Carmen she forced to the back of her mind, without a second thought.

As for Carmen, she made her way back inside, where Julia was tidying up. "How'd it go, Carm?" She responded with a thumbs-up. Julia breathed deeply and felt relieved.

"She looked so sexy and buff, I was afraid she was gonna sweep you away!...I was so scared," the former thief admitted.

Carmen kissed Julia on the cheek. Even *if* she was attracted to Lara, she had to put that aside. Besides, being in *two* long-distance relationships would be near-impossible and stretch her to the limit.

"Jules, I won't let her do that...you are right, she *is* sexy and buff. There's no doubt. I want to be with *you*, not her. She already has women she likes up the wazoo...she is trying to save one now in fact."

Now, Julia got it. Lara was so desperate because she wanted to save *her* girl. She guessed that she might have feelings for Carmen, but...those didn't matter… at least not now. Their relationship was safe and wouldn't be disrupted by any interlopers, although you couldn't call Lara an interloper. She was more of a lesbian tomb-raider, sharing some characteristics with the criminal archaeologist many galaxies away, a woman currently in a relationship with a geeky ex-princess.

"Thanks, Carm. I know having this long-distance relationship is hard. So, maybe, I'll try to get a job in San Francisco...or you can move to Toronto."

Carmen knew she was right. Having this distance between them created strain. They could work it out. For other people, it caused their relationships to split apart, as such relationships could become almost impossible to sustain.

"Yeah, if the fucking orange man wins, then I'll be *moving to Canada*… I don't like Kamala, since she's a murderous 'liberal' imperialist and génocidaire, but the orange man is an *outright fascist.*"

Julia completely agreed. She leaned in closer. "No matter what happens next, we need to be together." Carmen heartily agreed. She hugged Julia and they remained in a warm embrace. They'd be ready for whatever came their way.

End Notes

The resources I used for this fic are generally linked within the story itself. Otherwise, the tags I used I came up with on my own, based on other Tomb Raider fics out there. I really hope this spurns more people to write fics with this fandom, as it is slated for a season 2! Anyway, I really enjoyed writing this fic, and would love to write more fics featuring Lara Croft in the future.

Note: In the original fic I had linked to Noam Chomsky but considering his relation to Jeffrey Epstein and how they were close friends, I removed it from the text. I am planning to publish an entire fic on Lara Croft and Chomsky at some point. I had also added to the A/N on a certain site "I had planned originally to post this yesterday, but decided to do one more pass-through before posting it today." That line is no longer applicable.

This fic originally posted on Sunset, a femslash fanfic site. However, it was removed when I was sadly perma-banned for mishandling interactions with a few users, despite apologizing to those users, removing certain passages of fics, and apologizing to the Sunset admin (and others). As such, I would strongly recommend **against** *anyone* joining that site, or Superlove. Both admins (Melo/Kat for Superlove, Agnes for Sunset) are friends with each other. Those admins are very particular and not in a good way. I find the whole circumstance deeply unfortunate. I wish it could have been resolved a much better way.

Also, I saved a copy on the Internet Archive. I do not want this fic to be lost. I have not included some tags on Sunset (like Other (Male) Characters Are Mentioned, Queer Community, Romantic Attraction, and Exclusive to Sunset), but others have been retained. On Sunset it was listed as part of one series: "My Wonderful Legend of Lara Croft Fics."

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!